

LONDON ASSEMBLY LABOUR

Valerie Shawcross AM, Chair of the Transport Committee

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Mr Mike Weston

Operations Director Surface Transport
Transport for London
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Date: 23 March 2011

Dear Mr Weston,

As you may be aware, the Committee has taken a close interest in the transport services provided to disabled Londoners and the service provided by Dial-a-Ride in particular. Further to this work, I would like to raise a number of points with you about proposed changes to the eligibility assessments for Dial-a-Ride users.

I recently noted with interest that TfL has issued an invitation to tender for a contract, with an approximate value of £400,000, to deliver Door to Door eligibility assessments. Today I received a consultation document about proposed changes to the application process related to this tender exercise. The consultation document asks for responses by 15 April and states that TfL expects the "changes to the Dial-a-Ride application process to start in April 2011".

In March 2009, I wrote on behalf of the Committee to the then Director of Surface Transport following a meeting we held with Dial-a-Ride users. The letter expressed the Committee's "concerns that Dial-a-Ride does not consult with its users to a sufficient degree when deciding on ways the service might be changed". These concerns appear particularly relevant in light of the current consultation.

The proposed "virtual assessments" represent a significant change to the way eligibility is assessed for those who do not meet the automatic eligibility criteria for Dial-a-Ride services. On behalf of the Committee, I would therefore query whether the proposed three week consultation is adequate and whether the scope of the consultation is sufficiently broad.

In particular, I would draw your attention to Central Government's Code of Practice on Consultation which sets out how its own consultations should be run.¹ While I recognise this Code does not cover TfL's work, it includes two criteria which are particularly relevant in this case: "consultations should

¹ HM Government, Code of Practice on Consultation, 2000

normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible"; and "formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome". Your current consultation does not invite comment on the principle of introducing "virtual assessments" and asks for responses within three weeks about a change which is about to be implemented.

I would be grateful if you could respond to the points raised in this letter, considering the case for extending the scope and timing of the consultation. Specifically, please respond to the following questions about the changes:

1. When and by whom was the decision taken to outsource the assessment for eligibility for Door to Door mobility services?
2. What consultation took place with users and groups representing disabled people ahead of this decision?
3. What are the reasons for a) carrying out virtual assessments and b) outsourcing these assessments? What evidence does TfL have that its Dial-a-Ride services are being used by those who do not meet the eligibility criteria?
4. To what extent does TfL expect the cost of the contract to be recouped by reducing the number of eligible users?

I would be grateful if you could respond to these questions before the end of your own consultation period copying in the Committee's Scrutiny Manager Laura Warren (laura.warren@london.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely



Valerie Shawcross AM
Chair of the Transport Committee